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# A Profitable Friendship, Still?

## Town Twinning between Eastern and Western European Cities before and after 1989

Stefan Couperus and Dora Vrhoci

### Introduction

Since the end of World War II, towns and cities across Europe have established institutionalized, border-crossing, bilateral relationships, usually referred to as town twinning. Twinned towns have since engaged with the mutual exchange of people, knowledge, and post-war urban experiences in the domains of administration, religion, science, education, sports, arts, culture, and business.<sup>1</sup> Today almost 40 thousand cities are involved in twinning programmes in Europe.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter examines town twinning schemes that have emerged between urban communities in Eastern and Western Europe since the end of World War II. Whether spurred by larger European platforms of intercity collaboration or initiated by local communities themselves, many connections between cities in Western Europe and cities within the Soviet bloc (and Yugoslavia)

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<sup>1</sup> K. Pfundheller, *Städtepartnerschaften - Alternative Aussenpolitik Der Kommunen* (Opladen: Budrich, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> The data excludes Russia.

<http://www.twinning.org/uploads/assets/news/Number%20of%20twinning%20in%20Europe%20in%202010.pdf> (accessed June 30, 2017)

were established from the 1940s onwards, with a manifest increase just before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Many of these collaborative schemes still exist in the present day.

This chapter will question how the fall of communism in Europe has impacted East–West town twinning practices. Given that ‘1989’ coincided with some fundamental changes in urban governance with the introduction of New Public Management (NPM) at the local level and what scholars have called the emergence of entrepreneurial or neoliberal urbanism, it is interesting to see if, and to what extent, border-crossing, intercity collaborations were affected by the disappearance of the Iron Curtain. One might expect that the end of the Cold War and the concomitant removal of political or economic impediments opened up new avenues of collaboration for twinned towns on both sides of the former divide. Yet, as will be illustrated in this chapter, these new opportunities did not exclusively result in a single mode of entrepreneurial intra-European town twinning or ever-closer entanglements between cities in the (former) East and West. Adopting a loose historical institutionalist reading of post-war town twinning history, we will distinguish between a number of trajectories that East–West town twinning in Europe has undergone and discuss the extent to which 1989 proved to be a critical juncture or not. By doing so, town twinning presents itself as a promising angle with which to probe into the effects of 1989 on transnational urban collaboration.

Historiography mainly emphasizes the reconciliatory and integrative capacities of post-war town twinning projects in Europe, whereas more contemporary studies assess the significance and practices of town twinning against the backdrop of developmental aid, neoliberalism, sub-state diplomacy, and shifting geographies of globalization. As a result, town twinning as a historical

and transnational phenomenon tends to be analyzed in separate episodes of time, without looking at the longer histories many of these partnerships have had. Grand geopolitical or economic shifts seem to have prompted a proliferation of bilateral exchanges between cities across Europe and the globe within a particular time span, which are then superseded by another ‘wave’ of town twinning with a different rationale. This reading, too, is manifest in the historical studies on East–West twinings in Europe.

What seems to be missing at large is an assessment of European twinning practices across time periods.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, we only have a limited understanding of how and why town twinning has developed in the long run, and what has prompted changes in its praxis. Engaging with long(er) term (institutional) continuities and changes allows for a more historical-conceptual understanding of town twinning in Europe, which transcends individual case histories and cuts across preconceived periods, that is the first post-war decades of ‘association’ and ‘friendship’; the following period of reciprocity and exchange during the Cold War; and the commercial or neoliberal period, in which twinning was geared towards generating beneficial schemes for local businesses after 1989.<sup>4</sup>

Taking our cue from recent literature on particular twinned town arrangements that predate the fall of the Berlin Wall, this chapter will chart how East–West town twinning practices changed after 1989, against the backdrop of the emergence of neoliberal urbanism. We do not (a priori)

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<sup>3</sup> One study presents a longer term perspective on German and British twinning projects that do not encapsulate East–West entanglements: Julia Grosspietsch, “More than Food and Folk Music? Geographical Perspectives on European Town Twinning,” *Geography Compass* 3, no. 3 (2009): 1281-1304.

<sup>4</sup> Grosspietsch, “More than Food,” 1290-1291.

accept a chronological typology from community-driven incentives of solidarity and friendship across the Iron Curtain to an ever more utilitarian mode of bilateralism under the aegis of neoliberalism. Rather, we present the multitude of coexisting trajectories of town twinning before and after 1989.

In order to understand how ‘1989’ affected East–West town twinning practices, we first need to give a brief account of the conceptual meanings, the historical development, and the main interpretative frameworks in the scholarship of town twinning in Europe. Then a short historical account on the development of East–West town twinning during the Cold War will be given, followed by an empirical analysis of how twinning arrangements developed after 1989. Finally, the conclusion will discuss how we might be able to explain the different co-existing trajectories of East–West town twinning, and why it is worthwhile to look into sub-state, transnational urbanism over a longer period of time to understand the effect of 1989 on local communities in the (former) East and the West.

## Conceptualizing and Historicizing Town Twinning in Europe

In order to understand the development of town twinning between the East and the West, we need a concise conceptual and historical understanding of what town twinning entailed in Cold War Europe. This section will offer this context by first presenting a conceptual outline of town twinning and then articulating the development of post-war European town twinning and the subsequent interpretative frameworks that scholarship has offered to understand its practices and aims.

Myriad activities and endeavors have been ranked under the generic header of town twinning. Consequently, scholarly definitions of the term range from very general to more case-specific ones, emphasizing still the ‘the multidimensional and varied character of the phenomenon.’<sup>5</sup> However, all seem to adhere to some minimum definition of town twinning, amounting to the notion of regular exchange between towns in different countries. Yet, the nature, medium, and means of the exchange might vary, ranging from grassroots cultural or social exchanges between citizens—financially and administratively supported by municipal authorities—to top-down utilitarian or functional cooperation in the realms of trade, public administration, or services. Andreas Langenohl proposes a functional two-tier definition that articulates, first, a relationship of exchange between cities, involving ‘municipal citizens, political representatives, and [...] stakeholders in other realms of society,’ but, second, also emphasizes the necessity of the ‘voluntary participation of citizens in such exchange.’<sup>6</sup> Geographically, two types of town twinning in Europe have recently been conceptualized, that is border towns ‘directly neighbouring each other’ that share historical origins, and partnerships between more remote European cities.<sup>7</sup>

Town twinning within the post-war European framework is generally interpreted by historians as part of two distinct, yet often empirically overlapping, political and urban developments. First, town twinning is considered one of many consolidations of inter-municipal exchange geared

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<sup>5</sup> Jarosław Jańczak, “Town Twinning in Europe: Understanding Manifestations and Strategies,” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 32, no. 4 (2017): 477-495, here 490.

<sup>6</sup> Andreas Langenohl, “The Merits of Reciprocity: Small-town Twinning in the Wake of the Second World War,” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 32, no. 4 (2016): 557-576, here 558.

<sup>7</sup> Pertti Joenniemi and Jarosław Jańczak, “Theorizing Town Twinning-Towards a Global Perspective,” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 32, no. 4 (2017): 423-28.

towards circulating and sharing knowledge of and best practices in service delivery, administration, and the exploitation of urban utilities. Increasingly streamlined through international conferences, transnational organizations, and systemic exchanges of specific, technical knowledge through professional networks since the late nineteenth century, various intra-European town twinning projects added to this set of practices.<sup>8</sup>

Second, various studies see European town twinning as part of European integration narratives and practices, starting with Franco–German endeavours of intercity reconciliation during the interwar period. Also some British towns connected with bombed out French towns in the 1920s.<sup>9</sup> After World War II these interwar experiences sustained an emerging narrative of a ‘Locarno from below,’ offering an alternative to the failed, state-driven attempts to ameliorate Franco–German relations in 1925. This narrative epitomizes cities as key players in the post war promotion of peace, friendship, and European unity, which still resonates in contemporary European integration discourse at large.<sup>10</sup> A prominent official of the Council of European

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<sup>8</sup> See, among others: Pierre-Yves Saunier, “Taking Up the Bet on Connections: a Municipal Contribution,” *Contemporary European history* 4 (2002): 507–528; Pierre-Yves Saunier, “Sketches from the Urban Internationale, 1910–50: Voluntary Associations, International Institutions and US Philanthropic Foundations,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 2 (2001): 380–403; Pierre-Yves Saunier, “Changing the City: Urban International Information and the Lyon Municipality, 1900–1940”, *Planning Perspectives* 14 (1999): 19–48; Pierre-Yves Saunier and Shane Ewen, eds., *Another Global City: Historical Explorations into the Transnational Municipal Moment, 1850–2000* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Marjatta Hietala, *Services and Urbanization at the Turn of the Century: The Diffusion of Innovations* (Helsinki: Finnish Historical Society, 1987 ); Oscar Gaspari, “Cities against States? Hopes, Dreams and Shortcomings of the European Municipal Movement, 1900–1960,” *Contemporary European History* 11, no. 4 (2002): 597–622; Stefan Couperus, “Research in Urban History: Recent Theses on Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Municipal administration,” *Urban History* 37, no. 2 (2010): 322–332.

<sup>9</sup> K. Gildart and D. Howell, *Dictionary of Labour Biography* (New York: Springer, 2016), 78.

<sup>10</sup> On this see: Andreas Langenohl, *Town Twinning, Transnational Connections, and Trans-Local Citizenship Practices in Europe* (New York: Palgrave, 2015), 14–34.

Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) claims that ‘twinning is an essential part of the European project.’<sup>11</sup> A recent study, based on contemporary empirical analysis of intra-European twinning practices in the late twentieth century, affirms positive effects on EU support through town twinning.<sup>12</sup>

Both interpretative frameworks of European town twinning, however, may be challenged by a third, more contemporary reading. Rather than being a vehicle for functional exchanges of urban knowledge and experience, or a promotor of the European project, town twinning became subject to, or was even a catalyst for, neoliberal urbanism since the fall of European communism. Though the formal arrangements and rules of town twinning were, in essence, unaffected by the end of European communism, the goals, functions, and incentives of town twinning were in many cases, as will become clear in the next sections, increasingly informed by neoliberal, entrepreneurial logics. Some months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, David Harvey already conceptualized this as urban ‘entrepreneurialism,’ affecting the governance and political economy of late capitalist cities through public–private partnerships.<sup>13</sup>

This entrepreneurial turn has been at the heart of critical inquiries into the ‘neoliberalization’ of urban governance and society for the last three decades or so. The conceptual boundaries and studied geographies of urban entrepreneurialism have been stretched beyond initial understandings of how ‘Western cities’ or the ‘global North’ have prioritized market-driven

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<sup>11</sup> Grosspietsch, “More than Food,” 1295.

<sup>12</sup> Markus Tausendpfund and Lisa Schäfer, “Town Twinning and Political Support,” *Local Government Studies* 44 (2018): 552-576.

<sup>13</sup> David Harvey, “From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation of Urban Governance in Late Capitalism,” *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 71, no. 1 (1989): 3-17, here 6.



solutions to public problems, and recently scholars have begun to contextualize and differentiate varying—and sometimes contradictory—trajectories of neoliberal, entrepreneurial urban governance across the globe.<sup>14</sup> However, the intersection (and coincidence) of town twinning between Eastern and Western European cities; the end of European communism and the emergence of neoliberal, urban entrepreneurialism; and the ways in which they are interrelated, have not been articulated as such. Before the intersection of neoliberalism (or entrepreneurialism for that matter) and town twinning will be illustrated, we will first show how East–West town twinning schemes developed during the Cold War in Europe.

## Town Twinning in Cold War Europe

The idea that transnational collaborations would promote European integration and collaboration—the ‘Locarno from below’ motive—was key to the emergence of intercity networks in the 1950s and 1960s, mostly in the guise of so-called ‘town twinning chains.’ These chains were initiated and promoted by the Council of European Municipalities (from 1984 onwards, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions) and French–German endeavors.<sup>15</sup> This first wave of post-war town twinning centered primarily on re-establishing relationships between French, German, Italian, Dutch, and Belgian cities. Another pacifist platform, the *Monde Bilingue*, rendered twinning programmes between British and French cities during the 1950s and established a few transatlantic connections too. In general, these initiatives were

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<sup>14</sup> Jamie Peck, Nik Theodore, and Neil Brenner, “Neoliberal Urbanism Redux?” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37, no. 3 (2013): 1091–099.

<sup>15</sup> Antoine Vion, “Europe from the Bottom Up: Town Twinning in France during the Cold War,” *Contemporary European History* 11, no. 4 (2002): 623–40; Wilbur Zelinsky, “The Twinning of the World: Sister Cities in Geographic and Historical Perspective,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 81, no. 1 (1991): 1–31.

underpinned by a firm belief in the capacity of transborder connections between cities and local communities, though highly ceremonial and symbolic in nature, to promote European integration. Yet, competing twinning programmes, inspired by diverging ideological and geographical aspirations, amounted to what Antoine Vion calls a ‘twinning war’ in the late 1950s, which, in essence, revolved around a juxtaposition between initiatives more open to collaborations with communist cities in Eastern Europe and those expressing anti-communist sentiments and looking for partners within the West only.<sup>16</sup>

At least one twinning programme between East and West preceded anti-communist and Cold War rhetoric and was established before geopolitical alliances became an impediment for doing so: the town twinning project between Coventry and Stalingrad (since 1961, Volgograd) was established in 1944, before the end of World War II.<sup>17</sup> The project was initiated by women’s groups from Coventry that expressed sympathy for the devastated Russian city. The aim of reaching out to Stalingrad was to ‘try and create relationships’ between the two cities, which soon established them as symbols of solidarity between the East and the West.<sup>18</sup> The images of a war-wrecked city and memories of wartime destruction—Coventry was severely bombed in 1940, Stalingrad in late 1942—tied the local communities of these cities together, remaining dominant tropes running through the tale of the Coventry–Stalingrad/Volgograd twinning project throughout the second half of the twentieth century, according to one observer even during ‘the

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<sup>16</sup> Vion, “Europe from the Bottom Up,” 637.

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Richardson, *Twentieth-Century Coventry* (Bungay: the Chaucer Press, 1979) 325; Caroline Gould, *Coventry: The Making of a Modern City 1939-1973* (Swindon: Historic England Publishing, 2016), 122; Trevor Baker, “A Tale of Two Cities: How Coventry and Stalingrad Invented the Concept,” *The Guardian*, March 4, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/mar/04/twin-cities-coventry-stalingrad-war> (accessed June 30, 2017)

<sup>18</sup> Gould, *Coventry*, 122.

darkest days of the cold war.<sup>19</sup> Volgograd and Coventry have remained twinned to this day, including grand celebrations at their twinning anniversaries.<sup>20</sup>

During the 1950s, amidst fanning Cold War antagonism, a great number of British–Russian and French–Russian city pairings were established, again showing that (primarily Western) attempts were made by local authorities to open a non-political, civic dialogue with Soviet communities.<sup>21</sup> French communists played a big part in the proliferation of twinnings between French and Soviet cities from 1957 onwards, when they founded the *Federation Mondiale des Villes Jumelées-Cités Unis*. On the Soviet side an Association for Relations between Soviet and Foreign Cities was established to coordinate and stimulate twinning programmes with ‘peace supporters’ in the West.<sup>22</sup>

In his focus on town twinning in Cold War Britain, primarily during the period between the end of World War II and the economic crisis of the mid-1970s, Nick Clark observes that East–West twinning projects were largely organized as exchange programmes between students, workers, and sports clubs.<sup>23</sup> The programmes’ aim was to foster cooperation between Eastern and Western

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<sup>19</sup> Richardson, *Twentieth-Century Coventry*, 325.

<sup>20</sup> Stefan P. Goebel, “Commemorative Cosmopolis: Transnational Networks of Remembrance in Post-War Coventry,” in *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War*, eds. Stefan P. Goebel and Derek Keene (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), 163–183.

<sup>21</sup> John Van Oudenaren, *Detente in Europe: The Soviet Union and the West since 1953* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 292.

<sup>22</sup> Oudenaren, *Detente in Europe*, 292.

<sup>23</sup> Nick Clarke, “Town Twinning in Cold-War Britain: (Dis)Continuities in Twentieth-Century Municipal Internationalism,” *Contemporary British History* 24, no. 2 (2010): 173–191.

European cities that could survive disagreements between national governments and provide them with mutual security from totalitarian communism.<sup>24</sup>

In strong contrast to civic enthusiasm for town twinning, Western local authorities saw twinning projects with ‘sister cities’ from Eastern Europe as a threat of a possible penetration of communist influence through the exchange programmes.<sup>25</sup> Vice-versa, communists authorities remained reluctant to approve twinning schemes with Western cities, particularly in the GDR.<sup>26</sup> Despite the perceived possibility of communist or capitalist penetration and espionage against the backdrop of the polar atmosphere of the Cold War, Clarke nevertheless identifies several continuities in town twinning during this period, such as desires on the part of local authority members and officers for ‘peace, understanding, knowledge, know-how, and local welfare.’<sup>27</sup>

By the late 1980s, amidst the emerging détente between Gorbachev’s Soviet Union and the West, town twinning within Western Europe consolidated as cities developed local ‘foreign policies’ in the 1980s, primarily within the framework of umbrella organizations such as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).<sup>28</sup> Moreover, reluctance to perpetuate or establish twinning programmes diminished on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The GDR allowed local authorities to engage in twinning activities, albeit heavily monitored, whereas existing town twinning schemes were substantiated with regular communal exchanges in the realm of

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<sup>24</sup> Clarke, “Town Twinning in Cold-War Britain,” 175.

<sup>25</sup> Clarke, “Town Twinning in Cold-War Britain,” 180.

<sup>26</sup> Tassilo Herrschel and Peter Newman, *Cities as International Actors: Urban and Regional Governance Beyond the Nation State* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 138.

<sup>27</sup> Clarke, “Town Twinning in Cold-War Britain,” 187.

<sup>28</sup> Grosspietsch, “More than Food,” 1288.

education, sport, and culture.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the European Economic Community, urged by the CEMR, propelled new incentives for East–West town twinning a few months prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, offering financial support to visiting and host cities alike.<sup>30</sup> As such, prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, East–West town twinning practices took place in a more open and inviting atmosphere, which mainly revolved around an extended message of ‘Locarno from below’—generating mutual understanding and friendship at the civic level. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, new incentives, aspirations, and goals came to the fore.

## Town Twinning in Europe after 1989

The fall of European communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union obviously prompted considerations of whether and how existing twinning arrangements between Eastern and Western European cities should continue. The transition from communism to a new capitalist society proved troublesome in many Eastern European cities. Public authorities and local businesses and industries from Western cities supported various local aid programmes in the domains of health care, education, and culture throughout the 1990s, while keeping a keen eye on investment opportunities for local businesses in the newly emerging markets, a clear expression of the emerging entrepreneurial outlook in urban governance.

In general, studies on the transformation of European town twinning after the fall of communism witness a shift from predominantly cultural, humanitarian, and civic undertakings to increasingly

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<sup>29</sup> Herrschel and Newman, *Cities as International Actors*, 138.

<sup>30</sup> Ugur Sadioglu and Kadir Dede, eds., *Theoretical Foundations and Discussions on the Reformation Process in Local Governments* (Hershey: IGI Global, 2016), 92.

more functional, project-based, or potentially commercially beneficial exchanges, primarily incited by Western local authorities in the late 1990s and 2000s.<sup>31</sup> Other authors have witnessed a similar shift from an ‘associative phase,’ which is mainly about establishing friendship ties, to a ‘reciprocatative phase,’ centering, for instance, on mutual exchanges between schools and cultural organizations, to, ultimately, a ‘commercial phase.’ This last phase implies the redirection of twinning programmes by local authorities in favour of local businesses (importing and exporting consumer goods) and city branding for tourism, in line with the entrepreneurial turn in urban governance since the 1990s.<sup>32</sup>

Within the context of newly emerging markets in Central and Eastern Europe and the adaptation of former communist cities to liberal democracy and a Europeanizing and globalizing market economy, a great number of new East–West twin town arrangements were established. Particular impetus to advance and expand twinning activities between European cities previously divided by the Iron Curtain was given through the CEMR-organized conference in Poznan in 1993, and by an additional conference in the same city in the same year about Central European town twinning.<sup>33</sup> In general, the European Commission saw town twinning as an important instrument to promote the idea of ‘Europe for citizens.’ These initiatives and attitudes rendered a new East–

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<sup>31</sup> K. Kern, “Transnationale Städtenetzwerke in Europa,” in *Empirische Policy- und Verwaltungsforschung: Lokale, Nationale und Internationale Perspektiven*, ed. E. Schröter (Opladen, Germany: Leske + Budrich, 2001), 95–116, here 107.

<sup>32</sup> Grosspietsch, “More than Food,” 1290–1291. Also see: K. O’Toole, *Sister cities in Australia: A Survey Report* (Centre for Regional Development, Deakin University, Geelong Vic., 1999) and R. D. Cremer, A. De Bruin, and A. Dupuis, “International Sister-Cities: Bridging the Global-Local Divide,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 60 (2001): 377–401; M. Jayne, P. Hubbard, and D. Bell, “Twin Cities: Territorial and Relational Geographies of ‘Worldly’ Manchester,” *Urban Studies* 50, no. 2 (2013): 239–254.

<sup>33</sup> Council of Europe, *Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe* (Strasbourg: 1994), recommendation 4.

West ‘twinning boom,’ the second after the Western European one of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>34</sup>

Key to defining the role of municipalities within this twinning boom was an emerging notion of ‘municipal foreign policy,’ the idea that local communities and authorities had their own transnational sphere of trans-border exchange and dialogue alongside state-driven international relations.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, Western municipal actors in close collaboration with local organized interests, rather than individual citizens or voluntary associations, increasingly invested in establishing a network of foreign partners, particularly in emerging markets in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, as recent studies have shown, many cities in EU member states nowadays use twinning as a means to organize subnational influence in supranational policy-making.<sup>37</sup>

One might argue that this post-1989 town twinning boom is a clear effect of the coincidence of the end of European communism, the expansion of the EU, and the emergence of neoliberal urbanism and urban entrepreneurialism. Newly emerging markets, as will become clear below, were indeed an incentive for establishing new town twinning programmes, but also for the redirection of existing ones. However, not all existing East–West town twinning practices were redirected in the same way or to the same extent, if at all. The ‘old’ motives of exchanging

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<sup>34</sup> Grosspietsch, “More than Food,” 1287.

<sup>35</sup> This wide idea of international relations was promoted in IR theory of the early 1970s. See for instance: Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “Transnational Relations and World Politics,” *International Organisation* 25, no. 3 (1971): 329-349.

<sup>36</sup> The data excludes Russia.

<http://www.twinning.org/uploads/assets/news/Number%20of%20twinning%20in%20Europe%20in%202010.pdf> (accessed June 30, 2017)

<sup>37</sup> Renaud Payre, “The Importance of Being Connected: City Networks and Urban Government: Lyon and Eurocities (1990–2005),” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 34, no. 2 (2010): 260–280; K. Kern and H. Bulkeley, “Cities, Europeanization and Multi-Level Governance: Governing Climate Change through Transnational Municipal Networks,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 47, no. 2 (2009): 309–332.

functional urban knowledge and experience, as well as fostering friendship and mutual understanding ('Locarno from below'), in some cases remained central to town twinning practices. In the remainder of this analysis, we will present some of these diverging trajectories of East–West town twinning after 1989.

A substantial number of East–West twinned towns have witnessed a rather straightforward embrace of urban entrepreneurialism. The twinning project between Bristol (UK) and Tbilisi (Georgia) exemplifies this, showing the changing nature of town twinning in relation to the geopolitical changes resulting from the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Initiated in the late 1980s, the project began as a cultural programme based on student exchanges and similar activities that supported cultural interaction between the citizens of the sister cities.<sup>38</sup> In 1991 Georgia gained independence, after which interaction between the two cities gradually declined as a civil war, ignited by inter-ethnic conflicts, started in Georgia. In 1995 Tbilisi requested assistance from Bristol with reconstruction after the Georgian Civil War.<sup>39</sup> Bristol responded positively: Georgia was viewed as an emerging state needing help to establish a functioning local government after the fall of the Communist regime. Yet, this gesture of friendship was accompanied by a clear redirection of twinning goals. Bristol clearly articulated that assistance in the (physical) reconstruction of Tbilisi would go hand in hand with commercial opportunities and benefits for Bristol businesses, for instance with regard to the wine trade.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Tbilisi, and Georgia in general, was framed as an exotic tourist destination that exhibited natural

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<sup>38</sup> Nick Clarke, "In What Sense 'Spaces of Neoliberalism'? The New Localism, the New Politics of Scale, and Town twinning," *Political Geography* 28 (2009): 496-507.

<sup>39</sup> Nick Clarke, "Globalising Care? Town-Twinning in Britain since 1945," *Geoforum* 42 (2011): 115-125, here 123.

<sup>40</sup> Clarke, "Globalising Care?," 123.



and cultural richness that Bristolians could visit and enjoy.<sup>41</sup> From an institutional change perspective, this example shows how twinning was initially geared towards establishing civic friendship ties, whereas the new post-Civil War context in Georgia incited a clear redirection towards more commercialized and entrepreneurial goals from both parties: Tbilisi being a gateway to an emerging market for Bristolian enterprise, Bristol being a gateway to attracting British tourists.

Siarhei Liubimau identifies similar trends in town twinning projects in Central and Eastern Europe, arguing that the transformation of political borders after 1989 presented an opportunity for populations to express their newly-acquired autonomy—and agency for that matter.<sup>42</sup> Part of this autonomy was translated into a growing awareness about the roles of cities and municipalities in generating international trade and business.<sup>43</sup> Focusing on trans-border cooperation between German and Polish cities during the 1990s, Liubimau demonstrates how twin cities Görlitz and Zgorzelec, until 1945 two united parts of one city, reconceptualized cultural events, such as the European Capital of Culture (ECC) designation in 2010, as instruments of promotion through which their local communities and enterprises could gain specific competitive advantages. In Liubimau's view, the cities perceived the cultural event and the possibility of acquiring the ECC status as an opportunity to gain economic growth, foster social modernization, build a common cultural identity, pacify existing cleavages, and promote the international image of their urban units.<sup>44</sup> As such, the ECC served as an attempt to enhance

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<sup>41</sup> Clarke, "In what sense 'spaces of neoliberalism'?" 504.

<sup>42</sup> Siarhei Liubimau, "Place-Promotion and Scalar Restructuring in Urban Agglomerations on Internal EU Borders: The Case of Goerlitz-Zgorzelec," *Polish Sociological Review* 166 (2009): 213-288.

<sup>43</sup> Liubimau, "Place-Promotion," 216, 224.

<sup>44</sup> Liubimau, "Place-Promotion," 223.

place-specific competitive advantages, and transformed the already-established bond between the sister cities into a tool for gaining economic and social benefits.<sup>45</sup> This is another example of how town twinning became infused with entrepreneurial outlooks after the fall of communism and the advancement of European integration.

Yet, not all examples of the entrepreneurial turn in twinning schemes show the same sort of positive, mutual enthusiasm. Another twinning example on the German–Polish border reveals a somewhat more ambiguous shift towards the commercialization of relationships. Ulf Matthiesen and Hans-Joachim Bürkne identify the German–Polish border as crucial for the interference between ‘the East’ and ‘the West’.<sup>46</sup> They define the newly-shaped border area as a space where ‘different pathways of modernization and transformation directly bump into each other, implying different pathways of institutional capacity-building encounter each other in an unprecedented way.’<sup>47</sup> This collision of pathways has not been perceived in similar terms on both sides of the border. The example of the twinning project between Guben (Germany) and Gubin (Poland), basically a single urban area separated by the national border, shows exactly that. As curiosity and interest in establishing ‘a window to the West’ grew on the Polish side since the first rapprochement in the 1980s, citizens of Guben started to express fears about what increased mobility between the two towns could result in. German entrepreneurs, shopkeepers, and tradesmen believed that the intensification of post-Cold War relations between the two towns

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<sup>45</sup> Liubimau, “Place-Promotion,” 225.

<sup>46</sup> Ulf Matthiesen and Hans-Joachim Bürkner, “Antagonistic Structures in Border Areas: Local Milieux and Local Politics in the Polish-German Twin City Gubin/Guben,” *GeoJournal* 54, no. 1 (2001): 43-50.

<sup>47</sup> Matthiesen and Bürkner, “Antagonistic Structures,” 43.

worked very much in favour of Polish interests, whereas local business interests were inadequately protected from economic threats from ‘the East’ by the local authorities.<sup>48</sup>

Another instance of the commercialization of town twinning practices comes to the fore in Ljubljana and its sister cities across Western and Eastern Europe. Before Slovenia’s independence in 1991, Ljubljana had close connections with capital cities of the constituent republics of Yugoslavia. Its status as a regional center also allowed Ljubljana to foster twinning and cooperation partnerships with foreign cities during the 1980s. Some of these twinning projects include partnerships with Bratislava (Slovakia), Parma and Pesaro (Italy), and Leverkusen and Wiesbaden (West Germany). These projects initially relied on inter-cultural exchange between the cities, based on Ljubljana’s status as a regional center within Yugoslavia and the city’s aspiration to ‘internationalize.’ Yet, the increased accessibility of Western partners during the process of Slovenia’s accession to the European Union prompted Ljubljana to ‘invest’ more interest into its Western European partners. Ljubljana framed its sister-city networks as a means to advance cross-border regionalization, foreign trade, and tourism, with an emphasis on establishing a firmer connection with capital cities of EU Member States by the end of the 1990s.<sup>49</sup>

Against the backdrop of emerging entrepreneurial urbanism and, somewhat later, the eastbound expansion of the EU, these illustrations allow for interpreting the end of European communism

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<sup>48</sup> Matthiesen and Bürkner, “Antagonistic Structures,” 48.

<sup>49</sup> Nataša Pichler-Milanović, “Ljubljana: From ‘Beloved’ City of the Nation to Central European ‘Capital’,” in *Transformation of Cities in Central and Eastern Europe: Towards Globalisation*, eds. F.E. Ian Hamilton, Kaliopa Dimitrovska Andrews and Nataša Pichler-Milanović (New York: United Nations University Press, 2005), 318-363, here 337-338.

as a critical juncture for East–West town twinning. Articulations of friendship, brotherhood, and civic rapprochement that spurred the genesis of town twinning before 1989 were superseded by new practices that stressed commercial possibilities for local enterprises. One important observation needs to be added to this though. All of these examples relate to East–West town twinning schemes that originated in the mid- or late-1980s, implying that the institutional genesis and the critical juncture of town twinning were not separated by long time spans. The lack of longevity, and thus of historically rooted practices, might explain why commercial incentives became predominant rather quickly.

Another trajectory of post-1989 town twinning presents a rather different picture and is far from exemplifying a conversion from ‘Locarno from below’ to ‘entrepreneurialism.’ For this trajectory it is hard to articulate ‘1989’ as a critical juncture. The twinning programme between Coventry and Volgograd (1944) proves insightful here. The mutual civic support of the mid 1940s, continued throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in the guise of cultural collaborations and exchanges. Even recently, as the relationship between Britain and Russia deteriorated, the twinned towns seemed to have reaffirmed their entanglement by exchanging symbolic gifts, producing a film documentary, and composing a ‘twin song’, which was performed by the youth orchestras of both cities.<sup>50</sup> As such, the bond between the civic communities of Coventry and Volgograd remained at the heart of twinning activities, keeping geopolitical considerations, but also municipal entrepreneurialism largely out of the equation. Moreover, whereas other British cities cut off ties with Russian—and other—twinned cities for

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<sup>50</sup> Catherine Danks, “I Love Volgograd: The Enduring Wartime Relationship with One British City,” *The Conversation*, June 18, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/i-love-volgograd-the-enduring-wartime-relationship-with-one-british-city-98509> (accessed June 30, 2018).

political and economic reasons, Coventry sought to perpetuate its interconnectedness with ‘the citizens of Volgograd,’ as Coventry’s mayor stated in 2014.<sup>51</sup>

A similar continuity is visible in the town twinning project between Saint Petersburg (Russia) and Milan (Italy).<sup>52</sup> The project between Milan and Saint Petersburg (at that time Leningrad) started in 1967, and symbolically connected the two cities. The twinning project primarily included promotion and exchange of knowledge in the spheres of visual arts, literature, and language learning. The period after 1989 witnessed an increased number of cultural events, such as joint exhibitions and film festivals, shared between the cities. On the whole, the project largely remained focused on cultural exchange, despite the new possibilities for entrepreneurial initiatives.<sup>53</sup>

In 2017 Manchester (UK) and Saint Petersburg celebrated the fifty-fifth anniversary of their city partnership. Established in 1962, Manchester’s partnership with Saint Petersburg makes it the city’s ‘oldest formal city link.’<sup>54</sup> The relationship between the cities has been established with the aim of fostering ‘civic, cultural, educational and scientific cooperation.’<sup>55</sup> As in the case of its partnership with Milan, the cultural dimension of the twinning project between Saint Petersburg

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<sup>51</sup> *Coventry Telegraph*, 13 January 2014.

<sup>52</sup> The project has been suspended in 2012, on the initiative of Milan, due to the anti-homosexual rhetoric of the Russian government.

<sup>53</sup> Julia V. Nikolaeva, “Kul’turnye svjazi Sankt-Peterburga i Italii: osobennosti sovremennogo perioda,” *Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta kul’tury i isskustv* 3, no. 20 (2014): 16-20.

<sup>54</sup> “Manchester Sends Sympathies to Sister City Saint Petersburg after Terror Attack,” *Manchester City Council*, April 04, 2017, [http://www.manchester.gov.uk/news/article/7656/manchester\\_sends\\_sympathies\\_to\\_sister\\_city\\_st\\_petersburg\\_after\\_terror\\_attack](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/news/article/7656/manchester_sends_sympathies_to_sister_city_st_petersburg_after_terror_attack) (accessed on June 30, 2018).

<sup>55</sup> Catherine J. Danks, “Manchester and Leningrad: From Fraternal Allies to Partner Cities,” *Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta: serija 2, istorija* 4 (2016): 223-236, here 233.

and Manchester included joint organization among museums, student exchanges, and fostering friendship and solidarity within the post-war context. While the connection between the cities served as a ‘channel’ through which the British and Soviet governments could project humanity during the post-war years, the civic dimension of the twinning project remains at its base to the present day.<sup>56</sup>

These examples show how the emergence of urban entrepreneurialism after 1989 was not decisive for the development of all town twinning programmes. Rather they show how institutional drift—the continuation of an institutional practice under changed circumstances—is an apt way to describe the post-1989 development of some town twinning practices. Saliently, all of the above examples involve partnerships that have deeper historical roots than the ones straightforwardly taking the entrepreneurial turn. It seems that these older twinning schemes have been more conducive to perpetuating customs and traditions in the vein of the ‘Locarno from below’ motive.

Yet, some instances of town twinning are at odds with explaining the continuity or change in town twinning practices after 1989 along the lines of the duration of their existence. The twinning programme between the Dutch university town of Groningen and the maritime city of Murmansk in Russia, for example, illustrates how civic relations remained relevant amidst a parallel shift towards entrepreneurial twinning activities. Initiated by a local peace movement, and amplified by Groningen’s local authorities and the university, Dutch delegations succeeded in convincing (local) Soviet leaders to engage in a twinning programme in the late 1980s. Due to

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<sup>56</sup> Danks, “Manchester and Leningrad,” 234.

internal struggles in the Dutch twinning organization, exchanges were mostly initiated by the University of Groningen at first. From the mid-1990s onwards, a number of exchanges between schools and cultural associations, aid programmes (from the side of Groningen), and visits were arranged, coordinated by a local office in Murmansk and a Dutch foundation, both sponsored by the Dutch municipality of Groningen. However, formal contacts between officials from both sides remained very limited; twinning was a civic undertaking involving local voluntary associations well into the twenty-first century.<sup>57</sup> However, the last decade has witnessed a clear addition to the regular cultural and social activities between both communities.<sup>58</sup> Local Dutch investors and businessmen, supported by municipal officials, started looking into investment opportunities in Murmansk. Two seemingly separate sets of practices have since developed within the twinning programme: one still entailing exchanges geared towards the promotion of human rights, education, cultural life, and health; and one which centers on internationalizing local trade and business (particularly from the Dutch side) by means of public–private partnerships. The latter exchanges have recently focused on transport, sustainable energy production, chemical industry, dredging work, and tourism.<sup>59</sup>

As this twinning programme originates from the late 1980s, it is still possible to see how ‘1989’ was a critical juncture, in the sense that in its formative stage the civic–cultural practices

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<sup>57</sup> Charissa Feiken, Marjolijn van Vark and Ben ter Veer, *10 jaar stedenband Groningen - Moermansk* (Groningen: Stichting Stedenband Groningen-Moermansk, 1999), 87.

<sup>58</sup> Despite this, there is a salient continuity of the ‘friendship’ discourse in the annual reports of the Groningen–Murmansk partnership, despite recent restrictions imposed on the twinning activities by the central Russian government. Cf. *Jaarverslag Stedenband Groningen Murmansk*, 2017; n.n. *15 Jaar Stedenband Groningen - Moermansk* (Groningen: 2004); Charissa Feiken, Marjolijn van Vark and Ben ter Veer, *10 jaar stedenband Groningen - Moermansk* (Groningen: 1999).

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.groningenmoermansk.nl/nl/projects.html> (accessed on June 30, 2018).

gradually bifurcated into a two almost distinct sets of practices within the same hybrid, collaborative scheme. As such, the ‘Locarno from below’-infused activities were not superseded by entrepreneurial ones, but rather two coexisting trajectories, making use of the same institutional framework and rules, developed after 1989.

However, another example of post-1989 change, involving a twinning programme that was founded in the early 1960s, reveals how not all ‘older’ schemes were highly path-dependent. What started off as one of many friendship projects between East and West in 1961 between Brno (Czech Republic) and Rennes (France), transformed into a shared, cross-border environmental policy (i.e. communal waste reduction and the handling of biodegradable waste) initiated by local authorities and local businesses in the last two decades.<sup>60</sup> Here ‘policy learning,’ as was key to the inter-municipal, functional exchanges in Europe since the late nineteenth century, has amounted to policy co-creation, a process in which exchange of knowledge, experience, and skills has resulted in a shared, cross-border urban policy. This might be seen as an effect of ‘1989’ and the opening up—and ultimately removal—of intra-European borders, thus allowing for interpreting the end of communism as a critical juncture that changed many, but not all, pathways of town twinning.

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<sup>60</sup> Gabriela Hůlková, Otto Mertens, Barbora Veselá and David Koppitz, *Current Trends in Twinning Cooperation of Towns and Municipalities* (Prague: The Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic, 2012) 32; Antoine Vion, “Jumelages européens et modernisation municipale des villes françaises (1953-1989),” in *Vivre et construire l’Europe à l’échelle territoriale de 1945 à nos jours*, eds. Y. Denechere and M. B. Vincent (Brussels: PIE-Peter Lang, 2010), 49-68.



# Conclusion

Recent studies have attested to the variety of connections and entanglements that existed across the Iron Curtain throughout the Cold War.<sup>61</sup> One channel through which ideological or political cleavages were transcended—or circumvented—was shaped by bilateral contacts between towns and cities on both sides of the virtual, political, and sometimes physical divide.<sup>62</sup> East–West town twinning schemes were at very heart of those contacts.

The fall of European communism and the concomitant opening up of borders and a shared European market put town twinning, as a practice of transnational collaboration between local communities, in a different light, also taking into account the proliferation of urban entrepreneurialism, meaning the emergence of an international, market-oriented attitude in urban governance, local economies, and urban policy-making at large. Yet, these changed circumstances under which East–West town twinning operated, did not result in the convergence of town twinning to a single ‘entrepreneurial’ practice under the aegis of neoliberal urbanism. Whereas many town twinning schemes were redirected and commercialised after ‘1989’, others remained essentially unchanged or turned into functional, policy-driven, or hybrid variants.

Looking at our examples, a phasing typology (e.g. from associative, to reciprocative, to commercial) in the development of town twinning in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is thus problematic in capturing the change in East–West twinnings in Europe altogether. This implies that a linear post war narrative that starts with Cold War sub-state

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<sup>61</sup> For a recent inquiry and overview see: Simo Mikkonen and Pia Koivunen, *Beyond the Divide: Entangled Histories of Cold War Europe* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015).

<sup>62</sup> Mikkonen and Koivunen, *Beyond the Divide*, 197.

solidarity and friendship, and culminates in post-1989 neoliberal entrepreneurialism is too simplistic and reifying. The dual narrative that has underpinned post-war European town twinning since its inception (i.e. functional exchange of knowledge and fostering friendship ties à la ‘Locarno from below’) may continue to be recognized in many instances.

If we want to explain how ‘1989’ produced diverging trajectories of East–West town twinning, a few observations may be made. Exceptions noted, town twinning programmes that started in the twenty-five years after 1944 on the basis of mutual friendship, solidarity, and rapprochement (‘Locarno from below’), and which have endured Cold War antagonisms, seem less conducive to become ‘commercialized’ town twinning schemes. They are best described by institutional drift: the practices, customs, and rules remain largely unaffected by the new circumstances after 1989. In contrast, and still taking into account hybrid variants (e.g. Groningen–Murmansk, Brno–Rennes), twinning schemes that started during the era of Cold War thaw and *glasnost* in the 1980s, show a remarkable institutional conversion. Here the ‘Locarno from below’ motive is at best a subtext for fostering mutual business and commercial opportunities after 1989. Twinning arrangements increasingly involved expectations of economic reciprocity and benefit that were inconceivable before the fall of communism in Europe. Existing town twinning frameworks, most notably—and predominantly—in Western twin cities, were redeployed to foster economic opportunities for local stakeholders. Institutional change in these cases amounts to conversion; the initial goals, effects, and incentives of twinning were transformed under the aegis of urban entrepreneurialism in Europe.

However, some reservation needs to be made in pointing to these different trajectories of post-war East–West town twinning and the related historical-institutionalist explanations. Empirical evidence shows that ‘Locarno from below’ and ‘entrepreneurialism’ are not mutually exclusive in post-1989 town twinning practices. More in-depth archival and empirical research might reveal that these and other motives have been constitutive throughout the post-1989 decades, although very limitedly in some cases. Follow-up research needs to inquire into the conditions, contexts, and circumstances under which East–West town twinning practices and experiences have been affected by 1989. Studying the impact of the fall of European communism and the emergence of neoliberal logic in public administration and political economy through the lens of intercity collaborations is imperative to understand how and why 1989 created a new European landscape of interconnected local communities and actors.